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AUTHOR Handley, Ray
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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes development of an Australian wilderness program for at-risk and problem students and outlines the "wilderness enhanced" model on which it is based. In the late 1980s, the New South Wales Department of School Education developed a wilderness intervention for adolescents with a history of school behavior problems. A 6-day pilot program was deemed a success based on informal observations and content analysis of pre- and post-program evaluative discussions with participants. Subsequently, the South Coast Wilderness Program was born, and the wilderness enhanced model was developed as the theoretical basis for using a wilderness experience as a catalyst for attitude and behavior change in adolescents. The model is based on three key concepts: disequilibrium and tension resulting in a change in perception, metaphors to explore new meanings, and debriefing or processing the experience. Implementation depends on the leader's interactional style, which focuses participants on finding questions, experiencing disequilibrium and the metaphor, and processing the experience. To this end, the leader uses "nondirect intervention"--feedback that accentuates tension as participants face the inevitability of taking action. Strategic nondirect intervention aids in the management of group dynamics, empowers participants, and creates the freedom for constructive failure. Consistent and informed feedback during long-term followup further refines and extends the lessons learned in the wilderness. Various evaluations have provided quantitative and qualitative evidence of program success. (Contains 16 references.) (SV)

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The Wilderness Enhanced Model for Holistic Strategic Intervention

By Ray Handley

In the late eighties the world was a better place. Then, as the end of the millennium minus ten began, the wheels started to fall off. Economic fundamentalism surged into the public arena to take control, creating the accountability that would get everything back on track. Coupled with this, the enlightened offspring of the freedom thinking sixties/seventies generation entered late primary/elementary and secondary school. The clash of the dispassionate accountabilitists and the questioning, pessimistic hedonists began.

Within this climate education authorities were struggling to cope with the increasing problems generated by students with severe behaviour problems. Not that more students were necessarily being disruptive. It was just that fewer resources and less flexibility were available to deal with these students. Suspensions increased. And seemed to provide the main avenue for both punishment and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, a week or two away from a school that they really didn't want to be at anyway, to spend each day either surfing, watching TV or "hanging about" the community, did not seem to be having any marked degree of success. Alternatives were being tried such as support staff for schools, off campus schools and addition staff development, each with some success at the less entrenched, more compliant end of the disruptive student continuum. For those entrenched, non-compliant students a new strategy was clearly needed.

Within Australia, the New South Wales Department of School Education was particularly concerned. The South Coast Region set up a committee (the way things were done in 1988) and the issue investigated. Eventually, in 1989 a worldwide library search was undertaken to find approaches that had a record of success in turning around the attitude and behaviour of "at risk" adolescents. The resulting information revealed that outside of strategies such as those mentioned above, there were few with a proven effective result. What did appear however, was the long term, positive influence that a significant wilderness experience coupled with a systematic follow up program, could have in creating this turn around. It was therefore decided to run a pilot of this approach using the information gathered, and the expertise of several staff already working with "at risk" adolescents.

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The guidelines presented in the literature provided the foundation for the type of wilderness experience used in this pilot. Luckner (1987) presents a summary of these guidelines:

> 1) A sense of disequilibrium.
> 2) Novel setting. Perceived risks are high which creates a sense of the unknown or unpredictable. A constructive level of stress is important. A minimum 10 days duration is recommended.
> 3) Cooperative environment. A group of 7 to 12 participants who share common goals and responsibilities. It is vital that the leader takes a role as a participant, and a model of coping behaviour.
> 4) Unique problem solving situations. Simple, concrete situations with direct consequences that develop responsible solutions and confidence.
> 5) Achievement and success. The rewards of effort and perseverance that lead to enhanced self esteem.
> 6) Processing the experience. Time is important for the participants to discuss their thoughts, feelings and actions within the group.
> 7) Generalisation and transfer. Using the experience as a metaphor for personal growth and future endeavours ie a lesson to be used in other areas of life. The follow up of participants is crucial.

While the pilot program was only able to manage a duration of six days, it did achieve a strong congruence with the factors above. With valuable insights and experience, especially in the area of leadership style and the establishment of disequilibrium, a report was compiled. Include in this report were observations and a formal evaluation of the attitudinal change evident from pre to post the experience. Most insightful among the observations were:

Quite unexpectedly and totally uncharacteristically, the students overtly relied on the bush knowledge of the supervising teachers. The further we were away from "civilisation" the more the level of general compliance became absolute and quite unfathomable. The importance of thinking carefully and positively before acting was reinforced through the often uncomfortable consequences that resulted from the failure to do this (e.g., water rationing, map reading, food provisioning, hygiene, washing plates and utensils)

An appreciation of the natural environment was developed. Interestingly, the incidence of litter decreased throughout the week without intervention or harassment by the teachers.

Evaluation

> On his or her departure from the bus each student followed the same pattern. They slunk off down their driveway without saying goodbye to either the other students or us. It was definitely a reluctant happiness to be home. (Handley/Delbridge 1989)

The formal evaluation moved away from traditional psychometric measures due to questions of their effectiveness and clarity with difficult, much-tested adolescents. The

search for a means of assessment resulted in the formulation of a vocabulary analysis procedure based on the technique of content analysis outlined by Viney (1983). Based on the assumption that change is reflected in language - different perceptions and attitudes are accompanied by a different vocabulary with which they can be described, vocabulary analysis provided an observable, quantitative tool to assess change.

The procedure involved a taped conversation with the participants before and after a wilderness experience. The same set of open-ended questions were used during both interviews. It was the conversation rather than the answers generated by the questions that was important. These conversations were recorded, transcribed, broken into clauses and each clause searched for words with negative, positive, rational and irrational connotations. Below, in Table 1 are examples of words found in each of these categories.

Table 1
Examples of Words from Each Category

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	RATIONAL	IRRATIONAL
good better choice (sl) new like can	stupid sucks (sl) don't won't can't	some few will often probably	should nothing noone never all every always

The percentage of words in each category was calculated against the total number of clauses. The results are summarised in Table 2. The trends in this analysis are apparent. Generally, the conversational language became more positive and less irrational.

Table 2
Percentage of Words in Each Category

NAME	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE		RATIONAL		IRRATIONAL	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Chris	15%	23%	12%	4%	14%	18%	7%	-
Daniel	5%	40%	48%	15%	5%	-	19%	13%
Sean	4%	30%	39%	30%	22%	10%	17%	5%
Adam	9%	11%	12%	25%	5%	5%	16%	-
Paul	23%	22%	30%	5%	13%	9%	17%	7%

With the description and success of the approach clearly outlined the formal establishment of a program quickly followed. The South Coast Wilderness Program was born, and following an intensive period of exploration, reflection and experience the wilderness enhanced model was developed as the theoretical basis for using a wilderness experience as a catalyst for attitudinal and behavioural change with "at risk" adolescents.

Before leaving the history of the program behind, there are several key events that can be noted as significant in the development of the model:

- A 1990 research fellowship to investigate outdoor programs working with "at risk" adolescents in North America consolidated the necessity for a clear framework and the insistence that staff possess a wide range of interactional skills with difficult adolescents. Both these components were critically hard to find in the programs investigated, and seemed to generate many of the problems the programs were experiencing.
- An independent evaluation of the program in 1991 was both supportive and illuminating. The program was identified as a cybernetic, systemic model. This provided a strong focus for the process of developing a clear model for the program.
- The gradual adoption across a range of location and situations provided a systematic confirmation of the academic, theoretical and practical validity of the model. Under scrutiny and duplication all key elements of the model have retained their credibility.
- With the history now complete it is necessary to describe the wilderness enhanced model, and the practical impact it has made in working with adolescents experiencing severe behaviour problems.

A Metaphor of Change, or a Change of Metaphor?

Three key concepts provide the basis for the framework of the wilderness enhanced model:

- Disequilibrium/Tension
- Metaphor
- Processing the experience

To remain consistent and reflective of the model a formal explanation of these concepts would be inappropriate and indeed impossible. Therefore, let the discussion begin with a story. A Sufi story.

A Death Indicated (Indries Shah, 1971)
There was once a dervish who had sixty disciples. He had taught them as well as he could, and the time had come to undergo a new experience.
He called the disciples together and said:
"We must now go on a long journey. Something, I am not sure what, will happen on the way. Those of you who have absorbed enough to enter this stage will be able to accompany me. But first you must memorise this phrase; "I must die instead of the dervish." Be prepared to shout this out at any time, whenever I raise my arms."
Some of the disciples started muttering among themselves, now highly suspicious of the dervish's motives. No less than fifty-nine of the sixty deserted him, saying "He knows that he will be in danger at some time, and is preparing to sacrifice us instead of himself!"

They said to him, "You may even be planning some crime - perhaps even a murder; we can never follow you on terms like that."
The dervish and his sole remaining companion started the journey.
Now a terrible and unjust tyrant had seized the next city shortly before they entered it. He wanted to consolidate his rule with a dramatic act of force, and called his soldiery together. He said to them:
"Capture some wayfarer of meek aspect and bring him for judgment in the public square. I propose to sentence him as a miscreant."
The soldiers said, "We hear and obey!" went into the streets and pounced upon the first travelling stranger they met. He happened to be the disciple of the dervish.
The dervish followed the soldiers to the place where the king sat, while all the citizenry, hearing the drums of death and already trembling with fear, collected about.
The disciple was thrown down in front of the throne, and the king said:
"I have resolved to make an example of this vagabond, to show the people that we will not tolerate unconformity or attempted escape. You are to die at once."
At this the dervish called in a loud
"Accept my life, O Mighty Monarch, instead of the life of this useless youth! I am more blameworthy that he, for it was I who induced him to embark upon a life of wandering!"
At this point he raised both arms above his head, and the disciple cried out:
Munificent King! Please allow me to die - I must die instead of the dervish!"
The king was quite amazed. He said to his counsellors:
"What kind of people are these, vying with one another to taste death? If this is heroism, will it not inflame the people against me? Advise me as to what to do."
The counsellors conferred for a few moments. Then they said:
"Peacock of the Age! If this is heroism there is little that we can do about it, except to act more viciously until people lose heart. But we have nothing to lose if we ask this dervish why he is anxious to die."
When he was asked, the dervish replied:
"Imperial Majesty! It has been foretold that a man will die this day in this place; and he shall rise again and thereafter be immortal. Naturally, both I and my disciple want to be that man."
The king thought, "Why should I make other immortal, when I myself am not?"
After a moment's reflection, he gave orders that he should be executed immediately, instead of the wanderers. Then the worst of the king's evil accomplices, eager for immortality, killed themselves.
None of them rose again, and the dervish and his disciple went on their way in the confusion.

This allegory provides an enlightening example of the wilderness experience. In reading (or hearing) and trying to understand the story, those participating are impelled to question, to search for, and to experience something of personal value. The story has no meaning in itself beyond an interesting, if somewhat ridiculous tale. Yet there is a depth of meaning beyond the words and characters.

Using the three concepts underlying the wilderness enhanced model this depth of meaning can be explored.

1. Disequilibrium. Called by many names - dissonance, tension, the edge, uncomfortability; disequilibrium is the key for shifting perceptions. It is the catalyst by which the process of change begins. In our story the disequilibrium can be understood in the momentary confusion when the reader reaches the end, and finds himself or herself unresolved in the knowledge of what the story was about. Was it a joke? Was it a parable? Was it just an interesting tale? Does it have some deeper meaning? Does it hold some spiritual truth? The uncomfortability or unsettledness created by this disequilibrium drives the search for inner comfort and meaning. This drive has no end, and in objective reality, no definition. It is a personal process of reflection and experience. While the story has meaning it has no sense. It is the tension between these two factors, which impels the reader to a personal response.

Applying disequilibrium in a wider context, Lewins (1951) takes the concept one step further. He argues that while the inconsistency between an individual's perception and reality results in a tension, which can only be reduced through a decision to change that perception, it has a more significant effect. He believes that the stronger the tension before a decision is made, the greater the tendency to carry on with that decision, or retain the changed perception. In effect, Lewins is taking the old saying "Non pain, no gain" well beyond the physical context, arguing that it applies in a much broader psychological and behavioural context as well.

2. Metaphors. Before the metaphorical nature of this story is explored, it is important to make some clear distinctions in the meaning of metaphor. While a much used term, it is the belief of this writer that it has been abused to the point where clarity of meaning has been lost. Therefore, a concise review of the meaning of metaphor is needed to begin this discussion.

MacCormack (1976) has analysed the use of metaphor in science and religion to convey concepts and meaning that are beyond our experience. On metaphor he states:

> During the last decade philosophers have moved far beyond Aristotles' notion of metaphor as the use of one word to stand for another. They want to show just how it is possible for some metaphors to create meaning, for others to express analogies, and for still others to become "dead" as they enter our everyday usage.... The development of a "tension theory" of metaphor does just that - to offer an interpretation of the various forms and uses of metaphor.

The link with tension/disequilibrium provides a helpful guide by which to understand metaphor, and how it can be used. A metaphor challenges our thinking. It creates a question for which an answer is sought. When answers cannot be readily found a tension exists in our mind and we are forced to develop our own understanding from our existing experience. This tension continues until an understanding is resolved or experience confirms the answer. MacCormac uses the metaphor "Man is a wolf" to illustrate this process. At face value the expression is nonsense. As a metaphor it directs us to search our minds for what information we have about man and wolves that will enable us to make sense of the expression. The tension created by the unfamiliar association of man and wolf motivates and challenges us to explore new meanings and develop a different perspective of the nature of man (or as MacCormac also points out, the nature of wolves).

As we understand this process the three forms taken by metaphors become apparent. Using McCormack's classification:

1. Epiphors - A metaphor that achieves its meaning by expressing experience that is analogous to that of the hearer. The analogy between what the metaphor expresses and what the hearer has experienced allows it become part of our everyday experience.
2. Diaphors - A metaphor that suggests possible meanings rather than expresses meanings that are confirmed by the hearer. The meaning of the metaphor cannot be fully confirmed or dis-confirmed by the hearer.
3. Dead Metaphors - Through common usage and familiarity these have meanings clearly defined and understood e.g., time flies. For this discussion these need not be considered.

It must be noted that these distinctions are academic only, as all metaphors possess both an expressive and a suggestive element.

Refocussing on the Sufi allegory, the suggestive and expressive nature of the story can be understood. The reader is drawn to read both the story and the mystery between the lines. It is important that metaphors are perceived as being in many ways beyond understanding, while retaining the ability to become a window through which understanding may come. The metaphor is a process, not an entity unto itself, and is relevant only in the context of the observer.

3. Processing the experience. The final outcome of this story will in all probability never arrive. As experience and insight change, so will the depth of meaning, unfolded from the tale. Therefore, in maximising the effect of the story it is important to focus on the process of perception rather than the perceptions themselves. It is not necessary to "debrief" or question the effect of the story, in fact it may be unhelpful, misleading and limiting to do so. What is necessary is that those experiencing the story are briefed on the process of exploring how meaning can be conferred. Given a vocabulary and process, the reader can undertake their personal search for a meaning that can be reconciled within the wider context of their lives. In essence, the reader only needs the support to find the questions and the means to articulate the answers. The answers themselves are important only to the reader.

Theory into Practice: Strategic/Non-direct Intervention

Essential to creating wilderness experiences that provide catalysts for long term change is the ability to incorporate disequilibrium, metaphor and the processing of the experience into a manageable, effective practice. The practical implementation of the theory begins prior to the wilderness experience and continues during and after the time in the bush. While context and client groups may vary, the fundamental emphasis underlying effective practice is the interactional style of the leader. If leaders dominate in any way — through rescuing, ensuring success, the enforcement of external discipline or unwarranted shows of skill proficiency — the theory is lost and the experience becomes another outdoor activity: interesting and fun, but with little personal challenge and meaning. Therefore, the interactional style of the leaders must focus the participant on finding the questions, experiencing the disequilibrium and metaphor, and processing the

experience for personal meaning and relevance. How this can be achieved requires an understanding of the Strategic/Non-direct intervention exemplified within the wilderness enhanced approach. This can be briefly summarised in the following model:

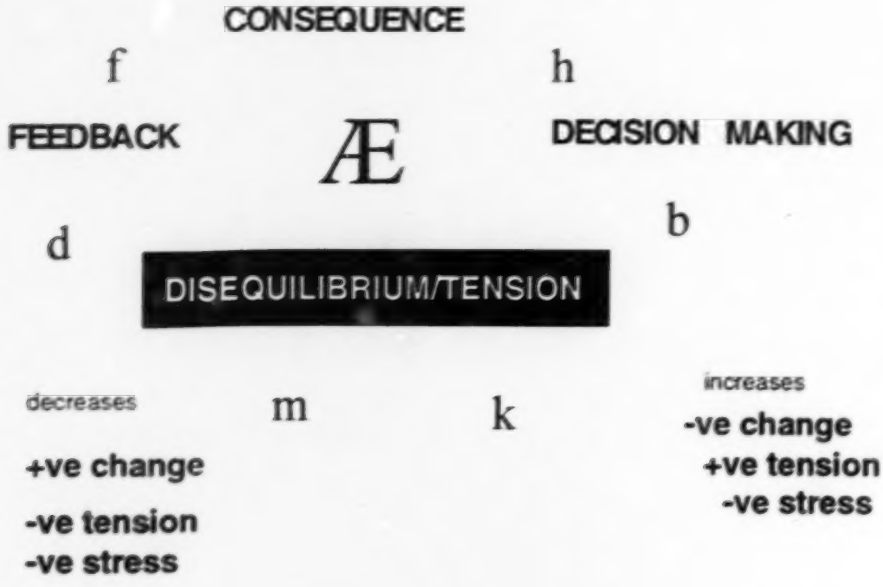

Figure 1: The Strategic/Non-direct Intervention Model

Whereas many approaches focus on the area of decision making, "Non-Direct Intervention" looks at providing the feedback to personally review the consequences. Through this, the tension/disequilibrium present within the experience is accentuated as participants face the inevitability of taking action. In focussing on decision making this tension is often alleviated and the experience becomes largely irrelevant.

Table 2 helps illustrates the difference between feedback and decision.

Table 2.
The Difference between Feedback and Decision.
(With reference to the Tension Model - Wilderness Enhanced Programs

FEEDBACK	DECISION
(when something is put back to itself)	(a point of position or exit)
Modelling	Advice
Storytelling	Lecture
Mystery - questions not answers	Interrogation - asks questions
Non-judgmental influence	Transparent Option outlines
Introspective reflection	Analytical dissection

In other terms, Non-Direct intervention is EVOCATIVE. It is the vehicle for metaphor and imagery. It invokes the questions for the experience to answer. Other approaches can tend towards the PROVOCATIVE. This is the vehicle for prescription and definition. They ask the questions for which answers must be found — usually with the options intentionally clear or accidentally limited.

With strategic/non-direct intervention the ability is created to effectively manage the group dynamics of the participants in such a way as to ensure the focus and direction of the program. Peer group pressure and interpersonal relationships can be adapted to work for the leaders rather than providing a united front again the imposition of the leader's will. The means to adapt group pressure is based on the leaders taking an informal mediation role within the group. The leader "bounces" pressure among the participants ensuring an even distribution of power and attention. This is achieved through the provision of consistent, non-judgmental feedback rather than intensive sessions of discussion compelling decisions, which may or may not be reflective of either the individual or collective, will. Attitudes and situations are mirrored to individuals through the group, and insights are presented with creativity and humour. Timing, patience and a clear understanding of the theoretical model on which the program is based are valuable tools for "getting it right."

A key emphasis of strategic/non-direct intervention is creating the freedom for failure. While much has been written for the need to build self-esteem through success, there has been little consideration of the need for failure to provide the tension, which from the lessons necessary for success can be experienced. Learning theory and experience generally concur that through difficulty, challenge or failure, changes are made, and lesson learnt. When success occurs, actions and attitudes are reinforced.

This does not validate the imposition of failure or creating experiences which "set up" participants for failure such as in "boot camp" style programs. What is does imply is that the interactional style of the leaders must be inclusion of giving participants the empowerment of making their own mistakes and finding their own solutions. Essential to strategic/non-direct intervention is a toolbox of approaches such as solution-focused intervention, reality therapy, conflict resolution, narrative therapy, and provocative therapy, cognitive restructuring. While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to outline these more fully, there is a wealth of material available that gives a clear guide to these approaches.

With the challenge of the wilderness experience providing a personal conjuration for the participant, the follow up can be used to explore and develop the many challenges overcome, or succumbed to, during the time away. A plethora of information and experience is available from the participant on their self talk, the differences and exceptions in their attitudes and behaviour, the narratives or stories on which their perceptions are based, and the provocative reality of themselves as themselves free of the defensive facades of the past. All that is required from the leader is the patience, commitment and skill to use the situations that occur back in the reality of home, school and the community to support the participant as they work to make sense of process. Working with those around the participant such as teachers, parents and community workers will assist in this understanding as consistent and informed feedback provides a further catalyst and a way of refining the lessons of the wilderness.

Evaluation

Throughout the history of the Wilderness Enhanced Model an emphasis on evaluation has pervaded all programs. Whether motivated by genuine interest, public accountability, departmental accountability, or hurried reactions to critical events, the need for evaluation has ensured that the model has endured a significant scrutiny from a wide cross-section of inquirers. As always with the evaluation of result as opposed to the evaluation of process and the consistency of the implementation practices to the theoretical model, all evaluation results are open to much interpretation. All that can be said is that the results found have satisfied the interests of those for whom the evaluations were completed. From within the model, the evaluation has taken the form of a systematic review and reflection, linked to a process audit of the program. Process auditing has been developed as a means to determine whether the current practices used by the program at any particular time are consistent with the stated philosophical and theoretical framework. This is achieved by breaking this theoretical framework into smaller components. Implementation practices are also broken into components and can then be matched again the theoretical components they are reflecting. Where mismatches occur an investigation is conducted to determine if the practice is consistent with the total process. If an inconsistency remains evident the practice is reviewed, and if necessary new procedures used to implement the theoretical framework. The use of process auditing has provided a valuable tool in the development of a clearly articulated and expansive theoretical basis for the model. Alongside this, it has provided a constant "check" on how the model was working and provides a clear direction for the ongoing development of staff skill.

However, where more traditional or quantitative information has been required, the following results have been used as indicators of success.

- A benchmark success rate of 80% has been maintained over the life of the Wilderness Enhanced Program. This reflects the percentage of participants presently included in the two-year follow up (those who were still at school, in further education or at work). While minor fluctuations have occurred (+ or - 5%) this figure has remained consistent over eight years.
- 96% of schools surveyed found the program to be moderately to very effective as a resource, and 84% effective for the students involved. (NSW Department of School Education Evaluation 1991)
- 93% of schools found the wilderness enhanced program a valuable to extremely valuable catalyst of behaviour change for the students involved.(South Coast Wilderness Enhanced Program Feedback Survey 1993)
- In 95% of participants changes in attitude and/or behaviour have been reported. Parents have reported a positive change in 84% of cases and no change in 6%. 94% of schools found the program to be moderately to very effective as a resource to the school, and 100% effective as a resource to the student. (Gippsland Wilderness Program Review 1994-95)
- Before the wilderness experience 92% of participants had been suspended. Following the wilderness experience 17% had received a one-day suspension, 6% had received less than 10 days and 77% had received no suspension at all. (Gippsland Wilderness Program Review 1994-95)
- 90% of parents would recommend the program to other people

- 81% of schools perceived a positive to very positive change in the student's behaviour. (Evaluation of the Met South West Wilderness Program September 1995)
- Teachers monitored a 37% improvement in the violent behaviour of participants from pre to post wilderness experience. (Behaviour Assessment Survey 1993 - 1995 SCWEP)

Several other independent studies have been conducted including a longitudinal research project (Brand 1996) and a detailed case study (Met south west 1993). These have further supported the value and effectiveness of the approach. A more detailed outline of these studies is beyond the time and space of this discussion.

In terms of qualitative evidence there is a incessant voice of approval as students, teachers and parents find that changes are made which draw some connection to the wilderness experience and the interactions that have followed. Some brief, yet insightful comments include:

> Asked why she was better at school, the reply came back. "Since the program I've realised there are just some things that you have to do." Student - Lowanna College, Victoria
>
> He is much easier to handle when a difficult situation is arising...still mixes with the same group (but) has the ability to make his own decisions. Teacher - South Coast Region, NSW
>
> Struggling under a heavy pack and making slow progress up a steep incline, the student comments, "This is hell. When I get back, I'm going to be nice to my Mum, because I've given her hell and now I know what she means." Student - East Gippsland, Victoria
>
> They (the students) are not perfect, in fact they are not always good, but they are no longer always bad.... During my 22 years teaching and my heavy involvement with the discipline and welfare structures at.... High School, the Wilderness Enhanced Program is by far the most successful program that I have seen for promoting an attitudinal change in these types of students. Head Teacher - South Coast Region, NSW
>
> I was on a one way path to self-destruction before I went on the wilderness enhanced program. I've got my School Certificate, and now I'm going to do my HSC. Student - South Coast Region, NSW

Conclusion

In finalising this discussion it is unnecessary within an adventure therapy forum to argue the value of using the wilderness experience as a tool for changing the attitudes of adolescents with behaviour problems. It is the definition the wilderness experience, and how it is used that is the key for success. From the experience of working with this client group over the last twenty years there are two fundamental components, which outweigh all others. First, a clear theoretical model must provide a basis for all practices. This must represent a constant and widely accepted approach, both within the area of adventure therapy and across other fields working with the same target group. Second, the interactional skills of the staff are paramount in the delivery of this framework. Without experienced, mature and insightful leadership any program becomes a collection of best efforts rather than a consistent example of best practice.

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